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AUTHOR Creemers, Bert P. M.; de Vries, Annemieke
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ABSTRACT

Using as an example the development of the comprehensive school concept in the Netherlands, this paper explores the strategy for educational innovation in a centralized national educational system, the role of educational research and evaluation in educational innovation, the impact of research on policy-making, and the strengths and weaknesses of educational research and evaluation for developing policy. The comprehensive school concept involves increasing the number of years of basic education for students while postponing the time when they will be tracked into specifically academic or vocational high schools by approximately 3 years. The paper analyzes the effects of changes in government on the availability of support for experimentation and discusses the failings of a strategy for development that called on the experimental schools to develop programs independently while contributing to the national effort. The types and functions of research necessary for implementation and evaluation of an innovation are considered next, followed by descriptions of the research done on the comprehensive school experiment and of the purposes to which the research was put. The paper concludes with an analysis of the factors affecting innovations and offers recommendations for more effective research, implementation, and policy-making strategies. (PGD)

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THE LIMITS OF POLICY RESEARCH:

THE CASE OF THE DUTCH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS

R.I.O.N., Haren
february 1982

Bert P.M. Creemers
Annemieke de Vries

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THE LIMITS OF RESEARCH: THE CASE OF THE DUTCH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS

0. INTRODUCTION

For many years politicians and educational researchers and practitioners have harbored the belief that systematic research and evaluation studies will provide a sound, scientific basis upon which to make decisions about the usefulness of proposed educational programs. This belief began to receive considerable support in the USA in the mid-1960s.

This flowered into an enormous evaluation movement and subsequently into the emphasis upon policy research in many programs in education administration and research methods. The initial period of emotional excitement about this wedding of research to administrative and political decision making began to fade as the realities of life in the schoolboardroom and the legislative halls became known tot evaluators and policy researchers.

It has become apparent that the role of research and evaluation has to be redefined - that research, no matter how well conducted of clearly explained, often gets distorted, abused, or even ignored when fundamental, and often far-reaching, decisions are made. The policy research and evaluation communities are now engaged in the complex task of redefining their role and methods so as to maximize their (potential) impact.

In the Netherlands two far reaching education innovations started in the 1970s: the innovations of the primary school and the comprehensive school. We will deal with the comprehensive school (Middenschool) only.

The innovational process and the role of educational research in it was partly based on the experience of others (Sweden, USA) and partly on a different definition of the role of research and evaluation in the Dutch educational innovation. Now that some time has passed, some questions can be stated when comparing the situation in the USA and the Netherlands:

- the strategy for educational innovation in a more centralised system (in the Netherlands)
- the role of educational research/evaluation in educational innovation
- the impact of research in policy decision-making
- the strength and weakness of educational research/evaluation.

This paper will explore the questions named above in the context of the development of comprehensive schools and the role of research in it.

The scheme of the paper is as follows:

1. - a brief description of the development of the Dutch comprehensive school
2. - the educational research and evaluation in the evaluation process
3. - a proposal for the improvement of the impact of educational research.

1. A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DUTCH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

1.1. A SUMMARY OF THE POLITICAL DECISIONS

The educational secondary school system in the Netherlands is very segmented. There are different types of schools, for general education and for vocational education, catering for different aptitudes of the students.
The Mammoetact, the secondary education act of 1968, made some improvements in the schoolsystem, for example lowering the thresholds between the different schooltypes. But the system as a whole remains the same.
In the late 1960s, early 1970s, there was a great deal of criticism on the secondary school, from the part of educational theorists and educational research and the labour unions. This critisism was based on research reports on the participation of different social classes in education, ideas concerning equal opportunity, ideas concerning the lack of motivation in students due to the curricula, ideas concerning the gap between what was learned in schools and what was going on in society.
The solution to the problems was to be, just as in other countries in Europe (like German and Sweden, where already a different secondary school system existed), the comprehensive school. When in 1974 the Netherlands got a central left government coalition (socialists and christian-democrats), this idea found a political basis. The Minister of Education presented to Parliament a discussion memorandum 'Contours of future education in the Netherlands' (1975), which contained the main principles for the comprehensive school, namely,
- The choice of further study and career is postponed by three or four years. Nowadays, in the selective categorial educational system, children generally have to choose at the age of 12 or 13, which usually has radical consequences for the rest of their lives. In the comprehensive school the choice is postponed until as close as possible to the age of 15, 16.
- The efforts of the primary school to offer equal, i.e. optimal, opportunities to all children for development must be continued. It is expected that a contribution can be made by reducing any disadvantages caused by home background and by the limitations of the traditional female role.
- The contents of the education offered to 12 to 16 year olds must be broadened. This can be achieved by increasing the number of subjects and

offering opportunities for a more balanced and less narrow development of all the skills the children have. These explicitly include the creative or artistic, organisational and social skills.
- Suitable teaching and learning situations must be offered for individual development and the stimulation of social awareness.
More than hitherto, education can help people to stop regarding society and their place in it as a foregone conclusion, and to start realizing that they can do something about it.

As there was a lot of disagreement about the ideas behind the comprehensive education and a comprehensive school system as well, it was impossible to introduce a comprehensive education act at the same time. But in the Netherlands it is possible to carry out experiments in education on the basis of a special act (the so called experimentation act), enabling schools to try out educational ideas in practice. In this case it means that comprehensive education is not provided for by act but is going to be the result of an experimentation process. On the basis of the experimentation act schools can be involved in an educational change process, relatively outside the ordinary school system. In 1985, after a period of ten years of experimenting with comprehensive education, there is to be an evaluation partly based on results of educational research and evaluation. Parliament will then have to decide on the legislative introduction of the comprehensive school.
In 1975 Parliament agreed on the development of comprehensive education within the boundaries of the experimentation act, after the Minister of Education had assured the opposing conservative party that in the experiment attention would be paid not only to the question of how to organize the comprehensive school, but also to the question of social desirability and educational realization (Leune, 1981, p. 381). In fact not much time is spent in Parliament on discussing the main principles of the comprehensive school and the goals of the experiment. No criteria were developed or indicated on which Parliament will be able to decide in 1985. About one year after the start of the experiment in 1976, there was an change in the government coalition from central-left to central-right (christian-democrats and conservatives). The conservative party was against the development of a comprehensive school replacing the whole secondary educational system and was in favour of a more differentiated segmented school system for secondary education. The conservative Minister of Education did not actually stop the

the experimental process but neither did he give it new impulses. He did withdraw some funds which supported the innovation process (less money for research and development). Furthermore he wrote his own discussionpaper for future secondary education (1980) which conflicted with the idea of comprehensive education. He proposed to postpone the choice of further study and career by two years (in different types of schooling) instead of three of four years for the duration of the comprehensive school (in one type of schooling) and he pleaded for more emphasis on the cognitive subject matters within school education. Those in favour of the comprehensive school did not agree with the proposal; therefore the discussion became polarized. But in the meantime the development of the comprehensive school did not make much progress. In 1981 there was again a change of government into a central-left coalition, with the same Minister of Education as four years earlier. Because of the instability of this government (there is only a small, uncertain majority) the Minister of Education wanted to secure the principles of the comprehensive school as soon as possible. He published a new proposal in last January, again a discussion memorandum (Verder na de basisschool, 1982). After one year of discussion a preparatory act will be presented in 1983. Then a period for experimentation in a greater number of schools will be available, preparing for a definite act. To make the proposal more acceptable for the opposition in Parliament the heavy accent on individual enhancement and social awareness has been left out; even the name was changed from comprehensive school into continued basic education for twelve to fifteen year olds.

As you can see the political scene has changed several times and with it the political decision making on innovations in the secondary school system. This influenced the function and role of research in the innovation process. Another boundary of educational research is set by the strategy used. We will go into that in more detail in the next paragraph.

1.2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STRATEGY

The comprehensive school experiment started in 1975. The educational strategy that was developed taking into consideration the disappointing results of the so-called R.D.D. strategy in educational innovation in the past (Lagerwey, 1981). This time a connection between development in schools and what was

going on at a national level (Ministry) would not be neglected. The schools should be the central focusing point of the whole change process. The Minister of Education appointed an Innovatory Committee for the Comprehensive School Experiment (ICM), which had to advise him om the experimental process, the strategy of change, the support for the experiment, and so on. When the experimental process started, only two schools where fully involved, five schools were partly involved. During the schoolyear 1981-1982 eight schools fully participate in the experimental process. In these schools the main principles of the comprehensive school mentioned above were supposed to get a concrete form by curriculum development and organization of the school and learning situation. The change processes in the schools were supposed to be supported by professional development, guidance, counseling, educational research, and so on. Furthermore a lot of facilities were available for the schools involved in the experiment. The comprehensive school experiment not only aimed at an educational innovation in seperate schools, but a comprehensive school on a national level should be developed. The results of the experimentation process such as curricula and types of organization, and so on should be used on a national level, especially after passing a comprehensive school act in Parliament. That means that the schools had to contribute to the establishment of comprehensive education on a national level, by departing in the experimentation process from the same principles by reporting on their experiences in their schools, by their products from the developmental process, which can be implemented in other schools and so on.

But it did not secceed; the experiment was isolated in the secondary school system and contribution to the change on the national level remained small. We give a short description of the present situation (Creemers en de Vries, 1981).

- The developmental construction of comprehensive education calls for a lot of energy and money. Each school has to make its own curriculum program, and also provide for its own development process, and so on.
That energy, that money is tight. Schools benefit too little from each other's experience, each school has its own development.
- The participants in the experiment schools, parents and children have too little certainty about the results of the developmental construction within the school. It depends too much on incidents without systematization

of experience and increase of educational know-how.
- This leads to casuistry. The experiences and results are hard to generalize or to systematize. It is impossible to draw conclusions concerning all the schools, and from individual schools to the national level and so on. Every time you have to look at an individual school, at the situation in that unique school; you do not know what to take of it, what is worthwhile.
- This means that in the future other schools will not be able to take advantage of the results, products and experiences of the schools involved in the experiment. They are uncertain, too, about the results, about what will happen in their schools when they start the experiment.
- In our opinion there is progress in the schools but it was hard work, it took a lot of time, money and dedication of people. There was no or little progress on a national level, because it is uncertain whether or not the developments in different schools (only a few) will go into the direction of the construction of comprehensive education. Furthermore it is very uncertain whether other schools, which don't have the same conditions, which do not have extra money and expertise can turn into the same comprehensive school as these schools. Therefore the innovation process cannot be implemented in other schools and only some of its products can be implemented. In this respect there is one more major difficulty, namely that the schools involved in the experiment at this moment are not representative of the Dutch educational secondary school system. This disappointing situation is caused by different factors we shall sum up in the following:

- The vagueness of the main principles.
The principles, as we have been formulated in par. 1.1. were not operationalized. This was partly due to the fact that there was no agreement between the different interest groups. The Innovatory Committee was given the task to formulate directions for the schools, how to give the main principles a concrete form. These directions were also very vague. There has never been a discussion about the means by which the principles could be attained, for example: what kind of curriculum should be developed, what kind of schoolorganization can provide a curriculum and which educational process is more democratic and emancipatory, what kind of differentiation is suitabele for comprehensive schools.
Consequently, the schools starting off on the same principles, went into different directions (ELM, 1982).

- The innovation history of the school.
The schools were given the opportunity to apply for participation in the experiment (Creemers, red., 1977). The Innovation Committee made a selection of the schools using criteria as representativenes (different denominations, types and counties). As a result of this the schools involved in the experiment are different in their pedagogical ideas, their opinions about comprehensive education, curricula and organization of the school.
Most of these differences are based on educational experiences prior to the comprehensive school experiment. For almost every school the experiment constituted a possibility to get more facilities (funds, support) to continue their own development.

- The support on the national level.
The strategy was intended to enlarge professional skills in schools. Besides, there would be a support system for curriculum development and guidance of the change processes within the school. But at the start of the experiment the supporting system was not capable of fullfilling its task.
In some cases, as in the case of curriculum development, there was no support at all. Gradually, the support system was organized but remained relatively outside of what was going on in the schools.

- The dominating position of the schools.
The participation of the schools was necessary to give form to the idea and principles of comprehensive education. As the principles and the guidelines for the develomental process were very vague and the support for the experiment came too late and remained fragmentary, the schools went on with their own developments and got a central part in the experiment as promised by the Innovation Committee. During the experiment the schools stressed time and again that they alone must give the comprehensive school its concrete form. As there was no alternative there was no clear opposition against this point of view.

- Political and social support for the comprehensive school.
As mentioned before the political scene changed several times and consequently the impetus for the comprehensive school. Connected with the diminishing political preference the basis for comprehensive education in society has become smaller since 1975 and many people, especially in teacher unions of general secondary and grammar school education, were strongly against it and

stayed that way. The weekly of the teacher union (N.G.L.) involves a lot of articles, statements and one sided views and summaries of educational research (Tromp, 1981). This led to an isolation of comprehensive education in society. Their arguments are: too little attention for good students, not every pupil is the same, impossible to develop, impossible to implement by teachers.

2. EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IN THE INNOVATION PROCESS

2.1. FUNCTION OF RESEARCH

There are different models for policy making (pure rationality model, decision making as problem solving, splitting up the total decision task, incrementalism; Scheerens, 1981), most of them are variants of the pure rationality model. There should be a lot of information, immediately or later on, on which political decisions can be based. One function of research is to provide the public policy maker with information on which decisions can be based. Furthermore because the process of giving the comprehensive school its concrete form, started off from scratch, information is needed to solve problems within the developmental process (formative evaluation). This means that research has different functions in policy-making such as: initiative, instrumentalism and legitimisation.
The goals of research in performing these functions are: description of the situation, explanation of the phenomena and evaluation of what is going on. On top of these goals action-research is directed to contribute to the innovative process (Leune, 1981).
Except for this policy-oriented research at the start of the innovative process, two other types of research are distinguished:

1. School oriented research (practitioner oriented research) should provide individual schools with information that they can use within their experimental process: development of programs, organization of the class, the school, teacher-pupil interaction, guidance of pupils and so on;
2. topic-oriented research should give information to both schools and more central level (administration, Innovatory Committee) about the specific topics, for example: developmental process, internal organization, forms of differentiation and so on (Mens, Van den Berg, 19).

With respect to the decision of Parliament at the start of the experiment, research should be evaluative to provide information for the final decision on comprehensive education at a national level.

Within evaluation there are several possibilities to make comparisons (Raschert, 1975).

a. Comparison of the actual situation within the school with its own innovative history;

b. comparison of different experimental schools;

c. comparison of experimental schools with ordinary schools;

d. comparison of experimental schools with the principles of the comprehensive education.

At first research was oriented to the first two levels of comparison. Later on in the experimental process the two other levels of comparison would be introduced, especially with respect to the implementation of the comprehensive school in the ordinary school system.

Looking at these levels of comparison and the different orientations of research, one can imagine that this leads to a huge program for research within an innovation process.

Research should provide a description of what is going on (input, flow and output of comprehensive education). Research should be evaluative, should contribute to the developmental process and, last but not least, topic oriented research should contribute to educational theory about comprehensive education, differentiation, school organization and so on.

The idea behind all this was that even in the development of comprehensive education, based on a normative orientation (ideal of equal opportunities) the change should be made on more or less rational basis within schools and on a more central level (Innovatory Committee, administration) and finally in more political decisions in parliament.

The decision on the research program and research projects within the experimental process was finally made by the Minister of Education. Following organogram shows the relationship between the various units involved in decision making processes on research (Scheerens, 1981).

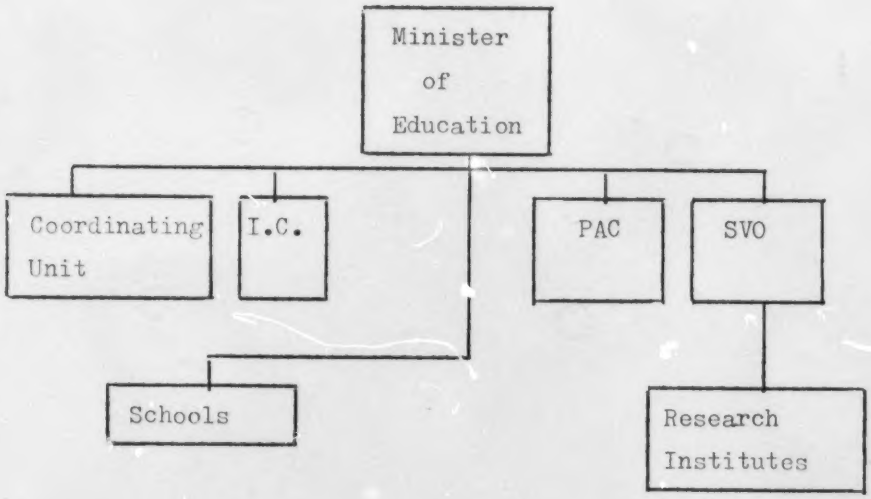

fig. 1.

"Coordination Unit" - institute, foundation or committee that coordinates the activities of schools participating in the experiment.

I.C. - Innovatory Committee

P.A.C. - Program Advisory Committee (these committees develop general research programs)

S.V.O. - Foundation of Educational Research

The Program Advisory Committee is set up by the Minister of Education and reports directly to him. It is composed of independent experts, field representatives and observers from the Innovatory Committee, SVO and the Department of Education. Its task is to develop a general research program and to advise on the "policy-relevance" of specific research proposals developed within the general research program.

Within the context of research on innovatory programs, SVO acts as "mandated supervisor" to the institutes that carry out the actual research projects. SVO also exercices process control over the ongoing research projects and advises the Minister on the allocation of research funds, for which purpose it employs the service of external experts.

The Innovatory Committee advises the Minister of Education both on the general research programs developed by the PAC and on research proposals.

In each sector (here: comprehensive school) there are different kinds of units which coordinate the activities of experimental schools.

In the case of the comprehensive school this is a fairly loosely structured committee, consisting of representatives from schools, the Department of Education and the Innovatory Committee.
For the experimental schools taking part in the comprehensive school experiment, both budget and program control are exercised by the Minister of Education. The work of the various research institutes, involved in the policy-oriented research in question, is supervised by SVO; SVO also exercises "mandated" budget control.

2.2. RESEARCH IN REALITY

The memorandum "Contours of future education in the Netherlands" on which the development of the comprehensive school system is based suggests that there is a lot of data and information about comprehensive education. In our opinion that is not quite true, but even if there is a lot of evidence, we did not gain advantage from the information that was available on comprehensive education. Not in political decision making, not in the developmental process, not in the educational support system within the innovatory process and so on. Perhaps this was the first violation of the pure rationality model in het experimental process of the comprehensive school. A lot of violations followed. The experimental process started when there was no research at all. After a period of time our Research Institute in the Northern part of the Netherlands was asked to make a description of the starting situation in the schools involved in the experiment. At that time no program advisory committee existed, which could criticize a research program and research proposals. We prepared the research project and took into consideration the main principles of comprehensive education and the guidelines for the developmental process, and made a proposal that in our opinion could serve the central level and the schools and which was to provide not only descriptive information but also form a basis for evaluation and decision making later on. Because there were no clearly defined research questions, we started with an almost endless deliberation with schools, Innovatory Committee and Department of Education about variables, topics and instruments.
But we have had a lot of quarrels with several schools about the research questions, the research process and finally about the research reports. The organizations on a central level denied that the information was useful for their purposes and so did the schools.

Immediate results of these quarrels were, firstly, that a clear distinction in research programming between policy oriented research and school practitioner oriented research was made and that within the policy oriented research priority was given to a description of the innovative situation within schools. This policy oriented research should give more information about the state of affairs.

In our opinion a lot of organizations, for example the Innovatory Committee and some schools were afraid of the evaluative information of that first research project. (Some conclusions in that report (1977): there is a lack of professionalism within schools, lack of support, only a special group of students goes tot comprehensive schools, the developmental process within the schools is based on their own innovation history and it is doubtful whether that process will lead to the comprehensive education (Creemers, a.o., 1977). Due to lack of money only two schools oriented researchers could be retained who carried out research in a few experimental schools. Though their work should contribute to all experimental schools it is not always so. When the structure was set up for the development of the research program and the research proposals it became obvious that a lot of interest groups and organizations had influence on the formulation of the program and research questions. As a result of this there is a lot of negotiation between the different organizations about research proposals. Different organizations involved in the innovative process had different options in respect to research.
The Ministry of Education, at least the administratieve part of it, was only interested in the description of the situation. For the Innovatory Committee the main task of research was description and legitimation of what the Innovatory Committee had done, especially in the period of the central right government. It was obvious that what they did not want was evaluative research, perhaps because they were afraid of the results.
The Foundation of Educational Research, which mandated research, requested excellent research designs, quantitive methods for evaluation (which others did not want), if possible a contribution to educational theory; in fact almost the opposite of what the Innovatory Committee and the Minister of Education wanted.
The schools in the innovatory process wanted support for their own experimental process. In their opinion they had to develop the comprehensive education and in their opinion they were the most vulnerable part in the experimental

organization. Therefore they were afraid of negative results of evaluation research. As a result of this the negotiation process took a lot of time and in fact there was much delay in the decision making process of the research. And in the research process itself there was another factor for delay, because different schools had objections to parts of the research project and wanted time for deliberation. Researchers and research institutes were dependent on all the organizations involved in the experiment: on the Minister of Education because he supplied the money for it, on the Innovatory Committee because they had an advising function concerning the educational research, on the Foundation for Educational Research because of the money supply and the advisory function and on the schools because research was carried out in these schools.
After all, this negotiation and the time spent on it was ineffective, because almost everybody was disappointed about the research results. We think they were right, because the conclusions were often a mixture of all the different options, with a personal touch of the researcher.

By the second half of 1980, ten research projects had been carried out in the comprehensive school experiment (since 1976). These ten projects covered the following themes:

- Description upon entrance and flow of the experimental school intakes in 1976 and 1977;
- five so-called partial studies i.e. literature surveys on the following topics: description of social awareness, analysis of the problems inherent to operationalising the general teaching aims of the innovatory program, analysis of the problems of assessing achievement at the end of the program, curriculum development for individual schools and instrumentation of process evaluation;
- description of characteristics of pupils'and parents'opinions at the beginning of the 1977/1978 schoolyear;
- an explanatory study on the feasibility of recurrent assessment of the state of affairs in schools;
- description of special facilities granted to experimental schools.

At present three research projects are being conducted which seek to describe year intakes of pupils (using tests and administrative data) as they enter, go through and finish the comprehensive school program. A fourth project, aiming at describing the way schools have operationalized the general comprehensive school aims, is being prepared.

As can be observed most of the research projects can be characterized as descriptive studies foreshadowing - when interpreted in a kind way - a general evaluation plan.

Perhaps now a new situation arises in the presentation of the memorandum of the continued basic education. When we look at the past we have to conclude that:

- After a lot of plans and ideas about research and evaluation in the innovatory process only a little bit of research is carried out, mostly descriptive studies and no formative evaluation. A lot of research is only focussed on the entering behaviour of pupils and the opinions of their parents about comprehensive education. We have little information about the comprehensive education itself during the three years following the pupils entrance in the school. In our opinion the research is situated in the margins of the innovative process.
- In our opinion the quality of research is poorer than should have been. There was no systematic research, no standardized tests, no standardized intelligence tests and aptitude scales because schools and others were opposed to these with the argument, that there should be different education with different goals and therefore the existing tests did not fit.
There were too little direct observations; at that time the teachers formed the main source of data.
As Scheerens mentioned there is an ideological clash between the dominant normative orientation of teachers and the technical rationality associated in particular research procedures (Scheerens, 1981, p. 29).
Finally, in our opinion the influence of schools and other parties was too big in the formulation of the final report when it was discussed with them before publication.
- The usefulness of research for different audiences was rather small.
That is what we have concluded, with utmost reserve.
Scheerens has carried out some interviews with governmental officials, teachers and members of the Innovatory Committee. Asked about the usefulness of the research projects most of the interviewees responded negatively.
This is striking, as the research design and what was going on actually in the research projects was a result of the negotiating process with all these people and yet afterwards they disagreed with the results. They had different reasons and on top of these reasons research itself had another reason: the quality of the research.

2.3. SOME REASONS FOR THE LITTLE IMPACT

Between the lines we have mentioned above some reasons for the little impact of research in the process of experimentation and political decision making. We will summarize them in the following:

1. The reality of rational decision making leads to evaluative anxiety in organizations and persons involved in the experimental process, especially when this is connected with a strategy which not clearly defines the goals and means of the innovative process and the functions of different organizations involved in the experimental process;
2. in fact in the innovative strategy used, there is no room for research with its own qualities. Especially the place of the schools in the strategy leads to objections and oppositions against research;
3. most of the time the results of research came too late. That was not only the responsibility of researchers but mostly of other participants in the innovative process;
4. by looking at almost everything involved in the innovation process, research has lost its own objectives. Researchers have to do good research, using their own professional orientation, formulating good research questions, making good designs and using or developing good instruments;
5. there is a discrepancy between centralized policy making and bottom-up change strategies. Perhaps research is a victim of an unsuccessful combination of a centralized and, at the same time, decentralized innovative process;
6. expecting immediate and useful results of research and making research programs in the negotiation process guided by this expectation and also the researchers conviction that, acting accordingly, the contribution of educational research to educational practice leads in fact to poor quality of research that confirm everybody's ideas about the innovative process, its own contribution to it and the not so flattering opinions about educational research.

3. IMPROVEMENT OF THE IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. POLITICAL DECISION MAKING AND CHANGE STRATEGIES

With respect to education the political system in the Netherlands is centralized. This means that the government provides money for education and sets up standards for education, not only for public schools but for the private schools for different denominations, too. Within the framework of these standards, which contain the educational structure, the goals that have to be achieved by education, by schools, public and private as well, the schools can work out education in their own way. There are, in our opinion, several good reasons for this centralized system: the Netherlands are relatively small, one avoids extreme differences between private and public schools and, most of all, education is so important that it has to be in the continuous care of the government. Several discussion memorandums, for example "Contours of the future education in the Netherlands" show that the government takes its role and function concerning education seriously.
As we have mentioned before there is a lot of disagreement on the value of the goals and structure of the present educational system and the main principles of educational innovation.
In essence this discussion is a political one, though a lot of different interest groups quarrel about these topics. Educational research plays a small part in the discussion. Different opponents make use of the research results for their own purposes. As we have seen before, formulation of a research program and of research questions is quite difficult in such a situation.
For the implementation of educational innovation it it not necessary to wait for the consensus of opinion in the society. But it has to be clear who states the research question and who is interested in the research results. Educational research cannot be the negotiator between different interest groups.
Even though it is not necessary to wait for a consensus, actual implementation of educational innovation requires a relatively stable government, especially in the situation of the comprehensive school, where there is an enormous disagreement.

The innovation of primary education, the so called basic education for 4 to 12 year olds, is being carried cut likewise by different governments. In literature different strategies are available for educational innovation and dissimination (implementation and adoption). Well known is the R.D.D. strategy on which a lot of educational innovation in the United States and the Netherlands is based. When this strategy is practized rigidly, results are disappointing, especially in the dissemination phase. Therefore new strategies emerged, such as the problem solving strategy and more bottom-up strategies for educational innovation. One more reason for this kind of strategies was the ideal in the Netherlands to go back to the basis, the democratization of education in development, practice and government of the school.

In the innovation of primary and secondary education the Innovatory Committee tried to make a combination of R.D.D., top-down and bottom-up strategies. In the case of the comprehensive school it dit not succeed. As showed earlier the bottom-up strategy prevailed over a more R.D.D. strategy.

As we have mentioned before we have serious problems with the strategy used in the development of the Dutch comprehensive school. All in, we suppose that a flexible form of R.D.D. can be used in educational innovation in a situation as in the Netherlands. The intentions of that model are that better use can be made of professional knowledge in each level (research, development and teaching) and that everybody contributes to the educational innovation. Flexible means that research, development, implementation and dissimination are not separate activities but activities that can be combined within the different activities several professional experiences are combined, too. This is efficient in terms of money, manpower and time.

In our opinion, with respect to education, there is a discrepancy between the centralized political system and bottom-up strategies. A solution has to be found for the problem of the discrepancy between central guidelines for the development of education and its operationalization in schools. On the other hand the bottom-up strategy is very inefficient, costs a lot of money, tends to ignore professional support and furthermore implementation in other schools does not succeed.

Educational research and evaluation can be a victim of this discrepancy when it gets demands from both or even more sides, as we have mentioned before. The central government wants a summative evaluation but cannot

formulate the guidelines, the goales, the criteria this kind of evaluation should be based on. On the other hand it neglects research reports that contain more formative evaluation of what is going on in different schools. The individual school wants support for its own developmental process and neglects at the same time the contribution of its own developmental process to the national educational development. In that case educational research, which doesn't want to limit itself to one particular situation, does not fit. In centralized political systems, schoolbased development alone does not fit; we have to build a relationship between this schoolbased change and what is going on on a central level. When a political system is more decentralized, as in the United States, more bottom-up strategies will be suitable. Research is mainly connected with what is going on in schools by means of formative evaluation. The question is whether more summative kinds of evaluation could be used to give the government more insight into what is happening into successes and failures.

If this problem of the discrepancy between the government and the concretization of innovation can be solved in a more flexible RDD-model, educational research and evaluation will be able to contribute to a more central innovation of the whole educational system and developmental processes in individual schools as well, providing information about the concretization of innovative ideas on both levels separately and in a relationship with each other.

3.2. FUNCTION OF THE RESEARCH

As we have seen educational research with respect to the development of the Dutch comprehensive school plays a role of minor importance in (political) decision making. This is not particularly so in this innovation process, but a lot of publications are about its dissappointing role. These publications contain proposals on how to increase the role of educational research (Gideonson, Häberlin, 1970). In the case of the comprehensive educational experiment several improvements can be made.

1. In order to change the conditions we need more insight into political decision making, for example using experiences gathered during the comprehensive school experiment. In a careful analysis of the decision making processes the decision points, the criteria, the information needed

and so on, can be found. After that the relationship between research and decision making can be improved.

2. A decision has to be made whether or not research is suitable in particular situations. It is not necessarily the task of research to gather the opinions of people such as interest groups, teachers, parents, pupils, the employers and employees. The discussion in society on which political decisions can be based is sometimes started by educational research but mostly by journals, opinionpapers and so on. Educational research or opinionresearch can sometimes contribute to this discussion by providing more objective information.

3. Formative evaluation can contribute to the developmental process on different levels, especially in bottom-up strategies, but also in top-down strategies.

Research provides a basis for rational decision making within the schools and provides the government with information on which decisions can be based. Furthermore we get information on the conditions, processes and results in the experimentation process which can be used in the dissemination of the educational innovation. Later on in the experimentation process more summative evaluation can be introduced. But some discrepancy between summative evaluation and bottom-up strategies will remain.

4. By means of a mitigated flexible RDD-strategy rationality can improve political decision making; results of educational research, including summative evaluation, have a better chance to contribute to it.

5. Our experiences in the comprehensive education experiment point out that sometimes research is not necessary and that the same job can be done on a school level by the principal, or school administration and on a central level by the Ministry of Education.

6. We have pointed out that research runs the risk of playing lipservice to different groups when there is a controversy (central level versus school level, different groups and so on).

In our opinion educational research always, and especially in such politically controversial situations, has to be critical, next to its other functions already mentioned; its criticism being related to these functions, if possible.

Critical educational research can show the advantages and disadvantages of educational innovation in terms of conditions, processes and outcomes.

This requires a relatively pure position of spcial science in society. In this case educational research has indeed an enlightning function (Weiss,), debunking of ideas and opinions that are available in society about education. In the case of the comprehensive school this means that educational research has to formulate its (own) research questions, (own) criteria, (own) goals, based on the analysis of literature, what is going on in society and in public policy. Research does not have to wait for the whole process of goals and ideas to get its concrete form. This is what research usually does, consequently having to provide alibis for the points of view of all parties involved and having to find arguments that contradict the opinion that research has no use. When researchers do their own job society will listen to their arguments. We have one more argument supporting that statement, based on research in the comprehensive school. When we carried out a second analysis on the material that we gathered in different descriptive studies, we pointed out why the change strategy failed, what went wrong in the developmental processes and change processes, and we put forward suggestions for some changes in the innovative strategy. And we have got an audience: public policy makers, journals and professionals in education.

Even when policy pursues rational decision making very often decisions are not rational and then the function of research is a critical one, relatively independent of the other parties involved.

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OFFICIAL NAME : Research Instituut voor het Onderwijs in het Noorden (R.I.O.N.)

TRANSLATED NAME : Educational Research Institute in the North (of the Netherlands)

R.I.O.N.
Research Instituut voor het Onderwijs in het Noorden
Nieuwe Stationsweg 5-9
9751 SZ HAREN
tel. (050) 349643/349674/349793